

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

should be sent to the papal court, ^{ct} to work for the peace of those decayed members who have rebelled against Holy Church."¹

Neri could now be spared more readily from Catherine's side, as her spiritual family had just received a new member of the same kind, who soon became her chosen friend and best-loved disciple: Stefano di Corrado Maconi. Born in 1347, Stefano was of the same age as Catherine herself; his parents, Messer Corrado and Madonna Giovanna Bandinelli Maconi, belonged to conspicuous houses among the lesser nobility of Siena, a former member of the family having even found a place in the *Inferno* of the great Florentine. Young and gallant, educated to a degree presumably rare among the nobles of that day, Stefano was likewise distinguished for his sweetness and purity of character, although sharing to the full in the social life of his order and city. Through a dispute on a point of honour at some social gathering, the Maconi had become involved in a feud with the potent families of the Tolomei and Rinaldini, and Stefano had felt himself compelled in honour to lead the retainers of his own family. The Maconi would willingly have made peace, but, in spite of the intervention of many influential citizens, the Tolomei and Rinaldini would hear of no reconciliation. At length Stefano's pious mother, Giovanna Maconi, persuaded him to have recourse to Catherine, and a certain noble friend of theirs, Pietro Bellanti, who had himself been reconciled to a deadly foe by her means, offered to bring him to her. ^{tf} I visited her, therefore, and she received me, not like a bashful maiden as I expected, but with most loving charity, as though welcoming a brother on his return from distant regions. At this I was amazed, and listened to her efficacious and holy words by which she compelled, rather than induced me, to go to confession and to live virtuously. I said : ' The finger of God is here.* And when she had heard the cause of my visit, she answered confidently : * Go, dearest son, and trust in the Lord, for I will gladly labour until you have an excellent peace ; and do you suffer me to take the

¹ Letter 226 (89).